



THE CHAOS QUESTION

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Everyone has struggled with this question. It is the biggest question of all. ***Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?*** Whether you're a Christian or not, spiritual or secular, you wonder about this question. Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?

- Why shootings at Columbine, Newtown, and Orlando?
- Why the Boston marathon bombing?
- Why chemical weapons in Syria?
- Why child sex trafficking?
- Why do drunk drivers kill 16,000 people every year in America?
- Why did 6 million Jews die in the Holocaust?
- Why Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Idi Amin, and Osama bin Laden?
- Why Manson, Bundy, and Dahmer?
- Why Bernie Madoff? Why Jerry Sandusky?
- Why hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes?
- Why rape, murder, and child abuse?
- Why cancer, Alzheimer's, and birth defects?
- Why did those planes fly into the World Trade Center towers on 9/11?

Headlines remind us every day that the world is a scary place. And it's not only in the headlines; it's in our personal lives too. We feel that insecurity and fear. And we wonder, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?

The secularist may answer the question like John Lennon did in his song "Imagine." Lennon believed all the evil and suffering in the world was due to ideology.

*Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try
No hell below us, above us only sky
Imagine all the people living for today*

*Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace*

For John Lennon, most of the problems in the world were caused by ideology. Religious ideology leads to conflict, even violence and war. Political ideology divides rather than unites. Economic ideology makes some rich and oppresses all the rest. If we could rid the world of ideology, there would be oneness and peace. But what is the likelihood of that happening? Not very likely. Why? Because of the human heart.

The answer to the biggest question – “Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?” – is the human heart. The problem is us. So the Christian will say we must turn to God. But the secularist will object and demand, “Why should I trust your loving God who allowed all of this pain and suffering?”

Whether a you’re Christian or not, spiritual or secular, all of us know something is wrong with the world. We feel it. We feel the pain. We feel the injustice. We know something is wrong. And, because 4 out of 5 people in the world believe in God in some form, the question we’re really asking is, “*Where is God and why doesn’t He do something?*”

Romans 1 answers that question.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools ...

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie ... ²⁶For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions ...

²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper” (Romans 1:18-28, NAS).

THE BIG QUESTION

The question of evil and suffering has caused more people throughout history to doubt God’s existence and God’s goodness more than any other question. This question is the chief obstacle to faith for a lot of people. This morning, I want to attempt to answer the question in three ways. One, with a philosophical answer. Two, with the theological answer from Romans 1. And three, with a personal and emotional answer. Let’s start with the philosophical answer.

Here’s how the argument goes. Evil and suffering are a reality in our world. And if God is powerful, then why doesn’t He do something about it? Perhaps it’s because He doesn’t care enough to do something about it. Or, if God is loving, and evil and suffering still exist, perhaps it’s because He can’t do anything about it. The obvious conclusion, the argument goes, is that the reality of evil and suffering prove that God cannot be both powerful and loving, or else He could and would do something about evil and suffering.

How would you respond to that? Is God powerful, but does not care enough to stop it? Or, is God loving, but just not strong enough to do anything about it? Which is it?

Be careful how you answer, because this is a binary trap. Either way you answer, you deny one of God's attributes. And that's what Rabbi Harold Kushner did in his famous book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The question gives us the choice between a powerful God and a loving God. Rabbi Kushner concluded that God was loving, but just not powerful enough to do anything about the evil and suffering in the world. But the logic is flawed because it limits God to two attributes. There is another variable to the equation that must be considered.

Yes, evil and suffering exist in the world. And yes, God is powerful and He can stop it. He could bring it all to a halt with the snap of His fingers. And yes, God is loving and He weeps over all the suffering in the world because of the pain it causes those He loves. But He is also just and He allows it. God granted us the freedom that we demanded, and by doing so, He also granted us the freedom to experience the consequences of our choices. And the consequences of living without God, of a world rejecting God, are chaos and suffering. ***God is just and He allows us to suffer the consequences of a fallen world, to break our self-reliance and self-will, so that we will turn back to Him.***

THIS FALLEN WORLD

Some ask, "Why didn't God create a world without evil and suffering?" He did. What we experience is not what God originally created or intended. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3). God spoke and the universe was born. He created the sun and the moon and the stars. He created the earth with plants and trees and food for us to eat. He filled the land, the ocean, and the sky with all kinds of living creatures. And the Lord declared that it was good.

But His crowning achievement was man, because we are created in the "image of God."¹ We are His masterpiece. And such special creatures required a special place to live. So God placed the man and woman in a garden called Eden.² Eden means "delight."³ It was created for the man and the woman to enjoy, and it was perfect.

But something went wrong in paradise. Adam and Eve disobeyed God. They sinned against Him. And the Bible says, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned ... Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners" (Romans 5:12, 19, NLT). We call it the Fall. And from that moment on, the world has not been the same.

Because Adam and Eve sinned, even nature was cursed. God said, "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Genesis 3:17, ESV). The Bible says, "All creation was subjected to God's curse" (Romans 8:20, NLT).⁴ Natural disasters – hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and wildfires – are abnormal and a result of the Fall.

When God created the world, it was beautiful, tranquil, and safe. But sin corrupted the world. So now, we live in a broken, fallen, and cursed world that is filled with suffering. All the chaos and suffering in the world is the result of the Fall; it is the consequence of rejecting God. And ***He allows all that pain and suffering because He loves us. Yes, because He loves us. God***

*allows us to suffer the consequences of a fallen world, to break our self-reliance and self-will, so that we will turn back to Him.*⁵

THE ROMANS 1 EXPLANATION

The Romans 1 explanation is based upon one chilling phrase, a phrase repeated three times. “God gave them over” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

Humankind rejected God, refused to “honor” God, and “did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer.” And in response, the Bible says, “God gave them over” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). Theologically, this is the concept of divine abandonment.⁶ God granted our wish. He gave us the freedom we demanded. When we insisted, “God, leave us alone!” God reluctantly said, “Okay, if that’s what you want. I’ll let you live life on your own. But I promise you, you won’t like it.” Humankind’s greatest mistake is thinking that life without God is better, more exciting, and more liberating. But it’s just not true. Life without God may seem appealing; but in reality, it is devastating!

God never stops loving us, but He does allow us to suffer the consequences of life without Him. C. S. Lewis explained that God allows people to “enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded.”⁷

From the moment Adam and Eve turned their hearts away from God, the world has been filled with chaos and suffering. And each of us has added to that suffering. The problem with the world is the human heart. The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). All of us are guilty. All of us are accomplices with Adam. We caused the Fall. It’s our fault. And God hates sin because it separates us from Him, because it forces Him to judge us, and because it brings all that pain and suffering down on us. Our sin disappoints God, it angers God, and it grieves God. Yet in spite of all we have done, God still loves us.

He loves us so much that He sacrificed His own Son in order to save us.⁸ The cross was God’s idea. The cross was God’s response to all the chaos and suffering in the world. The Bible says that “Jesus (was) delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” and was “crucified and killed” (Acts 2:23, ESV).⁹ Jesus died on the cross for us. He suffered in our place. He paid the penalty for my sin, for your sin, for all sin. Yes, there is still pain and suffering in this world, but Jesus saves us from this world. And one day, we will be with Him in heaven, and in that place the Bible promises there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more tragedy, no more suffering.¹⁰

If you’re not a Christian at this point in your life, if you don’t believe, God is speaking to you all the time. Every natural disaster. Every news report of war. Every funeral you attend. Every friend you visit in the hospital. God is constantly showing you that something is wrong, that the world is broken. He’s constantly showing you the consequences of humanity’s rejection of Him. And His hope is that you will cry out to Him for help.

And He has already answered your plea. Long ago, He sent His own Son into the world to come after you. God loves you so much that He let His Son die for you. That’s how much He

wants to save you. All you have to do is acknowledge that Jesus died in your place and that Jesus supernaturally rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God. And the moment you realize your need for God, the moment you believe in Jesus, the moment you run to Him, you will be forgiven of everything you've ever done wrong. You will experience peace within and peace with God. And you will have the assurance that you will spend eternity in heaven.

IT'S PERSONAL

The pain and suffering we've been talking about is not just philosophical, it's personal. We're not just talking about the headlines, we're talking about us. We're talking about the pain and suffering we feel.

I remember the time I had to move from a philosophical-theological answer to a personal answer. I was sharing the Gospel with a young woman and urging her to trust God. And she shot back at me, "Why should I trust God, when He did not protect me from my own father?! I was just a little girl!" I was trying to get her to trust in a God who did not protect her from sexual abuse as a child. Her pain was so real.

And so is our pain. The sudden loss of a loved one. The diagnosis of cancer. Being laid off. Divorce. Financial setback. All of us know suffering. And it hurts. And we wonder why? Is there an answer? Yes. Because theology is the truth of God from the heart of God. His truth is never separated from His love, so the truthful, loving answer is that ...

- Sometimes we suffer because we live in a fallen world. God is allowing the world to suffer the consequences of rejecting Him. The world is broken. Jesus said, "It rains on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45, NLT). We live in a fallen world and bad things happen to all people.
- Sometimes we suffer because other people do bad things that hurt us. God has given every person free will, and sometimes people use their free will in selfish and hurtful ways.
- Sometimes we suffer because of the consequences of our own sin, the consequences of bad choices. A lot of our suffering is self-inflicted.
- Sometimes we suffer because God wants to grow our faith, to teach us trust Him more, or to discipline us and get us on the right track.
- Sometimes we suffer because God has a higher purpose, perhaps to use our faithful endurance as a model for someone else.

Yes, sometimes, God allows us to suffer. But when we suffer, when we hurt, we can know that God cares.

The Hebrew people were in slavery in Egypt for over 400 years, and they thought God had forgotten them. But the Lord reassured them. "I have surely *seen* the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have *heard* their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am *aware* of their sufferings" (Exodus 3:7). "I have seen ... I have heard ... I am aware." God sees what you're going through. He hears your cries. And the Bible promises, "(When) the righteous cry and the Lord hears" (Psalm 34:17).¹¹ When we hurt and cry out to God, He will listen and He will comfort.

Whether we're talking about chaos and evil on a global scale or pain and suffering in our personal lives, it's not what God originally intended. It's all a result of the Fall, of humankind turning away from God. God granted us the freedom that we demanded, and He allows us to suffer the consequences. But there's something about pain we need to understand. Pain is good. Pain tells us that something is wrong. Like a fever is sign of an infection, pain and suffering tell us that something is wrong. And ***God allows that pain and suffering because He loves us. Yes, because He loves us. God allows us to suffer the consequences of a fallen world, to break our self-reliance and self-will, so that we will turn back to Him.***

NOTES

¹ TWOT, 1923a, צֶלֶם (elem), "image."

² See Genesis 2:7-8.

³ Derek Kidner, Genesis, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), page 62.

⁴ "Creation groans" and "waits" for its deliverance (Romans 8:22, 19).

⁵ But don't think that God works on some *quid pro quo* basis. During the 2011 Bastrop, Texas, wildfires, it was amazing to see a street with house after house burned to the ground and one left standing. But God did not direct the fire to burn some houses because He was mad at certain families and save some houses because He loved those families more. No! Jesus said, it "rains on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45, NLT). We live in a fallen world that, due to the sin of mankind, does not work as God originally intended. Bad things happen, both to good people and bad people. It rains on the just and the unjust. And He allows us to suffer the consequences of a fallen world, to break our self-reliance and self-will, so that we will turn back to Him.

⁶ God expressed His sorrow when He said, "My people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices" (Psalm 81:11-12).

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*.

⁸ "He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32, ESV).

⁹ Romans 11:22 describes God as "both kind and severe" (Romans 11:22, NLT). God's "gentle kindness and ruthless severity ... exist side by side" (MSG). God's "kindness" is His inherent goodness and delight to bless. God's severity" is His inherent justice and enforcement of righteousness. The Bible even says that "it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and (make) his life an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10, NIV).

¹⁰ See Revelation 21:4.

¹¹ The Bible also promises that "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17, NIV).